

Book Review

Permission to Feel: Unlock the Power of Emotions to Let Yourself and Your Child Thrive

Permission to Feel: Unlock the Power of Emotions to Let Yourself and Your Child Thrive, Marc Brackett Quercus, 2019, pp. 292, cost: \$37.47 (Amazon), ISBN: 978-1-787478817 (UK paperback)/ISBN: 978-1-787-47-883-1 (ebook)

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Permission to Feel is an insightful book based on 15 years of research by Marc Brackett, a psychologist, educator, professor and director of Yale University's Child Study Center and founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. From the opening pages, in which Brackett talks about his childhood experiences and how he hoped someone would ask him 'How are you feeling?' to Plato's observation that 'All learning has an emotional base,' we find value in this volume. His book renders the science of emotions straightforward and easy to incorporate into one's life. Brackett writes 'emotions ensure our survival and make us smarter.' One could add to that they can make us happier or sadder. 'Emotional experiences dictate the nature of all our relationships' and how 'Relationships are the most important aspects of our lives' are linked to health and wellbeing.

We learn to differentiate between intelligence quotient (IQ), emotional intelligence (EI), social intelligence (SI) and creativity. With creativity, 'cognitive firepower' is not enough, as Brackett observes that rational thoughts cannot drive creativity as emotions do. There are fine distinctions between emotions, feelings, mood, and meta-emotions (emotions about emotions).

Emotional Quotient (EQ) is highly regarded: Those with higher EQ are less depressed and less anxious, along with better grades, greater creativity, and better health outcomes. They experience less stress in the workplace and demonstrate greater performance and leadership abilities.

As the author states, 'by failing to address the most significant element of what makes us human, we are choking off the fire of passion and purpose, stunting and distorting the growth and maturity of entire generations . . . emotional skills are the missing link in a child's ability to grow up to be a successful adult.' There are skills that must be learned.

The research described in this volume is aligned with the development of the 'RULER' program for mastering emotions (recognising, understanding, labelling, expressing, and regulating emotion). It provides an opportunity to teach skills by first recognising emotions, understanding where they originate, learning to label and express emotions, and learning how to regulate them. This final step is challenging, as it relies on the earlier steps of understanding where emotions originate and the capacity (and language skills to express them). This is followed by the skill to regulate them at a particular time; for example, in the heat of the moment.

These skills are used in the corporate world, as well as in educational contexts, as they can be learned. However, even when you think you have these skills mastered, Brackett elaborates on how there is more to it. He teaches mindful breathing to calm the mind and body, forward-looking strategies that anticipate, and attention-shifting strategies that temper cognitive-reframing strategies to focus on triggers and see them differently; this includes the 'Meta-Moment' tool, which acts like our 'best selves,' stepping out of time and counting one, two, three. At this juncture, one can discern the clinician-researcher-educator shine through.

It takes an educator with clinical expertise to understand how people change, to lead the reader on this journey of learning and self-discovery. *Permission to Feel* is a good read — but have a highlighter available. It is a book I wish I had written myself, but I enjoyed the benefit of reading it. Other professionals will infuse these ideas into their clinical and/or training programs.

This easy-to-read volume is highly suitable for a general audience, as well as for the professional psychology community (working in the developmental space) where educational psychologists contribute to the acquisition of social emotional skills.

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